

Altus CEs Develop a

JOINT *Attitude*

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97th CES

Every once in a while you feel like you reach a point where you have come full circle. After basic training, most Air Force personnel think their days of low crawling through tall prairie grass and performing weapons PT at o'dark thirty are over. It's funny the stuff one can miss. A group of civil engineers recently found themselves grinning from ear to ear as their faces swiped the dirt during the low crawl, as their arms stung from constant repetitions with the 8-pound M-16, and while the rain and temperature kept falling and falling.

Members of the 97th Civil Engineer Squadron, Altus Air Force Base, OK, revived a host of nostalgic basic training memories while participating in a joint combat engineering exercise with B Company, 62nd Army Engineers from Fort Sill. This was the first in what is hoped to be a series of exercises designed to help each unit better understand how the other branch of service performs in a contingency environment. Members of the 97th Services Squadron also participated, providing hot breakfasts and dinners to the folks in the field.

The week-long exercise took place Oct. 21-25, 2002, at Altus

AFB and was set up to provide each branch one day to show their contingency engineering capabilities. As CMSgt Mark Brejcha, the original visionary of the exercise, put it, "We wanted to develop an opportunity for both branches to spread their peacock feathers."

The airmen and soldiers were divided into two units, each containing both Army and Air Force personnel — one flight, led by an Army officer, and one platoon, led by an Air Force officer. "We wanted to ensure that everyone had a joint team attitude," said Chief Brejcha. "I think we succeeded."

The Air Force demonstrated its abilities in several tasks, including the construction of hardback tent shelters, airfield damage repair, minimum operating strip plotting and airfield lighting. For the Army, the most impressive part of the day came when they shadowed and assisted on day-to-day CE work orders.

"That's stuff we just don't get to do," said 2Lt Chip Gaylord, platoon commander. "Fort Sill has a private contractor that performs its work orders, so other than their AIT (Advanced Individual Training), our guys have limited exposure to common maintenance issues."

Those work orders included several different tasks that significantly affected Altus AFB, such as repairing a water line break, installing a gas line, pouring concrete pads at the Child Development Center and Youth Center, and a 'high-vis' lighting repair project at the Altus Thrift Store. In addition, heavy equipment operators began laying topsoil on an 8-acre area of land near a C-17 assault strip clear zone in an effort to reduce foreign object debris (FOD) and bird air strike hazards.

The Army soldiers benefited from seeing how the Air Force engineers operated on a day-to-day basis, and the Army troops had their opportunity to impress as well. "One of the things that impressed me the most was their self-reliance," said Chief Brejcha. "They have the ability to make (vehicle) repairs on the spot without the assistance of a motor pool."

Bravo Company ran the Air Force through a portion of their common task training. This training taught airmen how to move from station to station via patrol formations, where they learned skills from the application of camouflage and self-aid buddy care to the deployment of clamor mines and construction of hasty fighting positions. "I feel better about being able to take care of ourselves with this knowledge," said Maj Tom Davison, Camp Euphoria commander.

The culmination of the Army engineering day happened at night with a simulated aggression scenario. Airmen and soldiers



Members of both the 97th CES and the U.S. Army's B Co, 62nd Engineering Battalion pour a concrete pad for a storage shelter at the Altus Child Development Center. (Photos by Amn Richard Rose)

scrambled to jointly defend their air base as a small, 10-man opposing force team with AK-47s, hand grenades and artillery made an unsuccessful attempt to take over Camp Euphoria.

But the exercise wasn't all work and no play. Thursday brought Sports Day to Camp Euphoria, where the flight and platoon separated back into Army and Air Force teams. The two then competed for the first semi-annual Army/Air Force Sports Day Competition trophy. Events included 5-on-5 basketball, push-ups, sit-ups, wally ball and a